

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-15

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJ: ROYO PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: PANAMA 6384

SUMMARY: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE-DESIGNATE ROYO HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE TO CALM SOME OF THE FEARS ABOUT WHAT HIS PRESIDENCY MIGHT ENTAIL. HE STATED THAT HE IS NOT A COMMUNIST. HE ASSURED PRIVATE BUSINESS AND THE CHURCH THAT THEY ARE BOTH IMPORTANT TO PANAMA'S FUTURE. TORRIJOS, ROYO SAID, REALLY WILL STEP ASIDE AS CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH HE CAN NEVER CEASE BEING THE COUNTRY'S LEADER. SEPARATELY, AND APPARENTLY WITH LITTLE SUCCESS, ROYO SOUGHT THE BLESSING OF TWO FORMER PRESIDENTS OF PANAMA. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD SEPTEMBER 6, ARISTIDES ROYO, GENERAL TORRIJOS' CHOICE AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, SOUGHT TO CALM SOME OF THE COMMONLY FELT FEARS ABOUT WHAT HIS PRESIDENCY MIGHT MEAN. FOR STARTERS, IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED IN PANAMA THAT ROYO IS OR HAS BEEN A COMMUNIST, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO THAT EFFECT. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THIS, ROYO STATED THAT HE IS NOT A

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COMMUNIST AND HAS NEVER BEEN ACTIVE IN A COMMUNIST PARTY OR ORGANIZATION. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT IDEOLOGICAL PLURALISM EXISTS IN PANAMA AND THAT HE RESPECTS IT.

2. SECOND, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, WHICH IS UNEASY ABOUT WHAT IT CONCEIVES AS ROYO'S LEFTIST TENDENCIES, WAS OFFERED A TRANQUILIZER WHEN HE STATED THAT THERE HAS

TO BE A "CONSISTENT POLICY" AND A DIALOG BETWEEN THE STATE AND PRIVATE BUSINESS SO THAT PRIVATE BUSINESS WILL FEEL SECURE IN ITS UNDERTAKINGS. PRIVATE BUSINESS, HE SAID, SHOULD HAVE A GREAT ROLE, CO-EXISTING WITH THE STATE, IN ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE OF THE NATION'S DEVELOPMENT.

3. ROYO ALSO TRIED TO GIVE THE CHURCH A REASSURING PAT ON THE HAND. ADMITTING THAT HIS PERSONAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICES WERE NOT WHAT THEY SHOULD BE, HE CITED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN PANAMA, PARTICULARLY ITS CONTRIBUTION TO AND SUPPORT OF THE SOLUTION (I.E., THE NEW CANAL TREATIES) TO THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE U.S. AND PANAMA. HE DESCRIBED THE PANAMIAN CHURCH IN VERY POSITIVE TERMS AS A "REVOLUTIONARY" CHURCH INTERESTED IN WHAT GOES ON AROUND IT AND CONCERNED NOT ONLY ABOUT THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL BUT ALSO THE SALVATION OF MAN -- ABOUT POVERTY, THE MARGINAL CLASSES OF SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. (THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CAME UNDER SOME FIRE FROM THE GOVERNMENT WHEN IT ISSUED A "PASTORAL LETTER", IN PART QUITE CRITICAL, JUST BEFORE THE AUGUST 6 ELECTIONS FOR COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES.)

4. FINALLY, ROYO TRIED TO GET ACROSS THE POINT THAT TORRIJOS SAYS WHAT HE MEANS AND MEANS WHAT HE SAYS -- THAT TORRIJOS REALLY DOES WANT ROYO TO BE THE PRESIDENT
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WITH FULL CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS, AND THAT TORRIJOS HIMSELF WILL NEITHER RENEW HIS POSITION AS CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT NOR SEEK THE PRESIDENCY. HOWEVER, ROYO CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT IT IS ALSO CERTAIN THAT TORRIJOS WILL NOT RESIGN AS LEADER OF THE COUNTRY AND OF ITS POLITICS -- INDEED, THAT TORRIJOS COULD NOT RESIGN HIS LEADERSHIP EVEN IF HE WANTED TO.

5. IN SEPARATE DEVELOPMENTS, ROYO MET THIS WEEK WITH TWO FORMER PRESIDENTS OF PANAMA, ROBERTO CHIARI AND RICARDO ARIAS ESPINOSA, SEEKING A DIALOG WITH AND THE COLLABORATION OF THESE PREVIOUS LEADERS. ACCORDING TO NEWS REPORTS, ARIAS EXPRESSED HIS CONFIDENCE IN ROYO'S CAPABILITIES, BUT OTHERWISE IT IS APPARENT THAT THE TWO PRESIDENTS DID NOT JUMP ON HIS BANDWAGON.

6. COMMENT: IT IS EVIDENT THAT ROYO IS TRYING TO MAKE HIMSELF MORE PALATABLE TO THE MORE CONSERVATIVE SECTORS OF PANAMIAN SOCIETY. IT IS DOUBTFUL, HOWEVER, THAT HE WILL CONVINCE VERY MANY PEOPLE WITH WORDS ALONE. AS HE HIMSELF CONFESSED DURING HIS PRESS CONFERENCE, TORRIJOS (AND, CORRESPONDINGLY, ROYO) SUFFERS FROM A

CERTAIN LACK OF CREDIBILITY. DIKEOS

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